



Tucker Wenc <16wenct@my.waterfordschools.org>

Jon Wenc in support of House Bill 5629

1 message

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To: judtestimony@cga.ct.gov

I write in full and passionate support of House Bill 5629, an act concerning a diversionary program for persons under age 21 for motor vehicle violations and crimes related to underage drinking. My own personal experience resulting from a drunk driving crash was a life-changing event for me 25 years ago. On October 4th, 1990, I was involved in a single vehicle accident in New London in which I was a passenger in a car driven by someone who was legally intoxicated. As a passenger, I bore the brunt of the collision as the car I was in literally wrapped around a telephone pole on the passenger side. The injuries were life-threatening - about an hour to get the car off the pole and me out of the car, and I was incredibly fortunate to survive. Fantastic work by the New London fire and police departments got me out of the car, and the LifeStar personnel and staff at Hartford Hospital kept me alive. I owe my life to them and will forever be grateful. Fractured ribs, shoulder, and skull with a traumatic brain injury, it was my legs that were impacted most. Fractured Femur and Tibia in both legs with severed arteries led to the eventual amputation of my left leg just above my knee. At this point, as a young man and athlete I became despondent and lost my will to live. It really was devastation and depression beyond description. After multiple surgeries and a lengthy period of hospitalization and rehabilitation, my right leg was eventually saved, though it is highly compromised with steel rods through my femur and tibia with screws affixed in my ankle and knee joints. For the record, the driver survived this crash as well though was charged with driving under the influence of alcohol. The trauma of this event will have a physical and emotional impact on me for the rest of my life.

Since this event 25 years ago, I've been incredibly blessed to have the support I do. This support has allowed me to live a very full life as a productive member of my community. Now married 20 years and a father of three teens, I've been a professional educator in CT for 15 years and am currently a sixth grade math teacher at Bennie Dover Jackson Middle School in New London. I was and remain determined to not let this event bring me down or ruin my life, and the pain I feel in my legs every step I take are a constant reminder of the horrific experience it was for me. While this is a reality, I choose not to dwell in that space but rather have decided to use this experience to help educate others. To turn what was a true nightmare for me into something that can educate, impact, and have a positive influence. It took me many, many years to have the confidence and courage to share my experience, fearful of being pitied as I speak to groups as a victim. An aspect of shame certainly kept me away from sharing my experience as well, and I simply wasn't ready for a long time. When I finally decided that I needed to share my experience, I feel so comforted and supported by the outstanding professionals who work at MADD. It is through MADD's VIP and SMART programs that - as a victim of a drunk driving crash that was 100% preventable - I've been provided an opportunity to turn this horrific experience into something positive. Even many years later, the service MADD provides me in the sharing of my experience has been very healing. It's allowed me to recognize that there are silver linings in all of our experiences, that I can have an influence through the sharing of an incident that traumatized me beyond words. Most importantly, this experience is much bigger than me. As I share and educate, the response I get has led me to feel very strongly that my message resonates and that the SMART program as a whole is an effective one. I genuinely believe that through this educational program youthful offenders are being presented with something memorable, impactful, and that they will make better decisions in the future because of this program. I am honored to have an opportunity to influence.

I am so incredibly thankful for MADD's professionalism and educational programs.

In closing, I consistently remind myself that the best "thank you" to all those who helped me is to live well and do my best. We all owe it to ourselves and our communities to live as well as we know how and to do our best. Support of House Bill 5629 would be doing our best for our communities. Thank you.

Jon Wenc